California's Public Schools: What Experts Say About Their Mission and Functions

By Patricia L. de Cos

Prepared for the Joint Legislative Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education – Kindergarten Through University

ISBN 1-58703-131-0

This report is not copyrighted and may be reproduced with attribution

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
IDENTIFIED PURPOSES OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA.	3
Providing Universal Education	3
Universal education	
Public schools as social equalizers	
The State's different subsystems	
Tracking of students	
BASIC EDUCATION V. MULTIFACETED PURPOSES	5
Providing a basic education	6
Broader goals for public high schools	6
Health and child care functions of public education	
Multiple purposes such as citizenship and job training	
THE MULTIPLE AND ADDITIVE FUNCTIONS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION	
The multiple and additive functions of public education	10
Contrary views	
STUDENTS, NEEDS	
Students' needs	11
EQUALIZATION AND ADEQUACY OF FUNDING	12
Funding equalization	12
Adequacy of funding	
ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION	
Accountability and assessment	14
STATE AND LOCAL TENSION	15
The State's role in defining the purpose of public education	15
PUBLIC SCHOOLS AS CENTERS OF COMMUNITIES	
Schools as community centers	16
MORALS AND VALUES – TEACHING CHARACTER	16
The teaching of morals, values, and character education	16
CHANGES IN PURPOSE OVER TIME	
Evolution of California's public education	17
THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PURPOSE AND QUALITY OF TEACHERS	
The relationship between teachers and the purpose of public education	
SCHOOL CHOICE FOR PARENTS	19
School Choice	19
SCALE OF CLASS, SCHOOL, AND DISTRICT	19
Role of Scale of Class, School, and District	
THE EFFECTS OF THE STATE-ADOPTED CONTENT STANDARDS	21
LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED	25

Introduction

At the request of the Joint Legislative Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education – Kindergarten Through University, the author interviewed many individuals who have participated in and contributed to California's public K-12 educational system over the past 40 years. For example, the interviewees range from former leading legislator Senator Leroy Greene, former State Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill Honig, Michael Kirst, a leading academic in educational issues, and three former Executive Directors of the State Board of Education, and others. A full list of individuals interviewed is at the end of this paper. The author conducted interviews between November 1999 and February 2000.

The major findings of this scan of experts are the wide range of opinions and lack of clear consensus on the underlying intent of the purpose of public education in California.

The author asked each interviewee two basic open-ended questions:

- What is the purpose and function of California's K-12 public education system?
- Whether and how the adopted content standards will enhance the state's changing economic transition from a manufacturing-based economy to one more dependent on services, information, and technology?

The responses reflect an astounding range of viewpoints regarding the purpose of public education in California. Opinions may in part depend on the roles the interviewees have played and on constituencies they have represented.

The responses are quoted from interviews but without attribution to *specific* interviewees.

All quotations are indented from the left (like this paragraph) and where necessary separated from one another by a short, centered line.

Unindented paragraphs are the author's summaries and comments.

IDENTIFIED PURPOSES OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA

Providing Universal Education

Many of the interviewees commented that public education is designed to serve *all* children. California's compulsory and civil rights education laws lay the foundation for this broad social goal. Some interviewees stressed that public education has served to bring together different segments of society, and as such, it functions as a social equalizer.

Some interviewees noted that the state's public education system has evolved into subsystems, which are largely dependent upon socio-economic and geographic distributions of the population. For example, California's suburban, rural, and urban school districts are very different. Related to this concept of different subsystems, some interviewees commented on the continuing practice of identifying relatively successful and unsuccessful students and providing varying educational content (as in "tracking" students). This practice is viewed in both positive and negative ways. Several interviewees suggested that the purpose of public education is to provide multiple opportunities for success and not to pigeonhole students into singular paths.

Universal education

In the 1960s, the motto became that each and every child should have the dignity and right to education – it was no longer a gift, but a right. Thus, the system was blamed, at fault, for those children not succeeding in the system.

The mission is to educate all of our students, legal and illegal, to high standards and capability – to be good participating citizens in our democracy and to earn a living. We haven't always worked so hard to make sure that all children succeed. It used to be more acceptable that you would say you have flunked and you're out (weed folks out). There's still some of that. The 1954 *Brown v. Topeka* case struck down the separate policy, which was inherently unequal. That was a wake-up call to provide for an equal education . . . You have to internalize the belief that these kids can learn, and that they'll rise to the challenge.

The mission over the last 50 years has gotten larger, which is a good thing. We've done a better job to be more concerned about all children, i.e., Mexican American children, special education children, driver's safety, early childhood education.

The mission/function is to try to take a hugely diverse group of young people with every language and bring them up to a high level of educational achievement. I

define success by above average . . . One reason that we don't do well on international competitions is that our system doesn't separate the sheep from the goats as early on as in other countries. We could choose to do that. That's the difficulty with high stakes; we expect *all* to pass the exams. There's a contradiction.

The mission is to prepare all students for universities that only a few go to. That's the purpose, not what it should be.

The mission is to give kids a good academic foundation, whether they go to college or not. The mission is three things to: 1) prepare people for work, by giving them the basic skills in reading, thinking . . .; 2) pass down the civic ethical values of society (this goes back to Jeffersonian principles), civics, knowing about government; and 3) prepare for personal growth, knowing what you can do.

In the 1970s, the K-12 functions were to prepare people for college *or* the world of work. Now we do both! There is a difference in terms of rhetoric of who it is that we are educating – *all kids*. We should ask what are we preparing for now and in the future and by whom. Mission has dealt with for what and by whom. Until the 1950s, high school education meant a lot; you could go out and get a good job. We know that it's no longer the case. At the present, we are preparing for an educated and good citizenry, to become life-long learners. For the future, it is to have access to the economy through employment, self-employment, become knowledge workers. Advanced post-secondary education training mostly will be electronic – it won't be an option anymore! To answer the question, by whom – we don't basically recognize home schooling. We have a "don't ask" and "don't tell" phenomenon. That's unacceptable. Wherever kids sit, they need a good education.

Public schools as social equalizers

There is a difference in free schools vs. public schools vs. government schools. Public schools ought to be our guarantee – a social equalizer. The function ought to be productive: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The State's different subsystems

California's public education system is broken down into three subsystems: a) poor and decrepit urban school system; b) poor poverty-ridden rural system; and c) really good suburban system. It is very different on where you are at geographically. We have a class-biased system: we would like it to be because of

personal choice, not because of destiny, or because the public education system failed us.

Like Dan Walters says, we have a bi-modal system, based on the socio-economic distribution of society: the quite affluent that are successful (and the educational system is doing well) and one with new immigrants in large urban areas that the system is not serving as well.

There is a strong push now toward mediocrity. Part of the government-run schools is to choose the winners for our new economy, to pigeonhole others into jobs... Public education is not an equal opportunity because some schools produce children with many merits and others don't produce anything to highlight.

Tracking of students

Officially, tracking of students was discredited in 1980. In schools, many people still think we should track students.

I don't believe in tracking kids – the mission should reflect an open academic door, where students can stop off at any point and re-enter. Women need flexibility as they pursue careers – they are out there in the wilderness, doing it on their own. How can we achieve the goal to empower the citizenry?

For example, why promote students if they cannot read or write? Americans are fairly ambivalent and we like to give people second chances...We need to provide multiple chances and have open doors to higher education.

Basic Education v. Multifaceted Purposes

Some interviewees emphatically stated that the purpose of public education is to provide a basic education and to emphasize teaching of the three Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic). Several interviewees further argued that providing basic skills is limited to elementary and middle grades, whereas the purpose of high school education is broader.

In contrast, some interviewees felt that there are multiple purposes for public education, including establishing a foundation for citizenship, training for a job, and providing child care services as opposed to academic goals. This was not a universal view, and several interviewees noted that the purpose of public education depends on one's viewpoint and what one seeks to achieve.

Providing a basic education

The mission is to teach kids the basic tools to be life-long learners: the 3 Rs.
Reading and math are gateway skills and establish a solid foundation. Its all part
of a continuum to prepare people to go on to become citizens, taxpayers, members
of society.

For the K-8 grades, the purpose is to provide a basic education.

Some functions may be different at the elementary level: basic skills, every child must read by the 3rd grade; self esteem; good capability of working with numbers; the course of history.

At the elementary level, the mission is to teach elementary skills and history and science, too.

Broader goals for public high schools

For the high school grades, there are three main goals:

- (a) college preparatory;
- (b) life skills preparation, including technical and service orientation; and
- (c) participation in society.

By default, it is predicated on everyone going on to college.

There are undergraduate schools, such as Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, that produce graduates with skill sets, raw tools for Silicon Valley. We should be able to produce that out of high schools.

The mission of K-12 public schools needs to be seen in a broader context. From here on out, high school education isn't enough to get "good" jobs – it'll require some post-secondary education. It's a major transition. The mission is to prepare people for further education; to give students the ability to earn a living and to go on to higher education. In the past, some students went on; now, we're seeing every student must come out of the (K-12) system and succeed in higher

education. It's hard for high schools to see themselves as a transition - a linkage for articulation purposes.

We want high school graduates who can read the daily newspapers, follow basic instructions, have a basic commitment to civil responsibilities, know enough about history, and are reasonably tolerant. We will always fall somewhat short in that.

We have to ask ourselves, "For whom do we run the high schools? Just the college bound? Vocational education?" We should set the core standards for high school, so that the graduates qualify for community college curriculum. Everyone should reach the standards. However, the State Board of Education forgot about the nuances. Expecting that everyone should pass algebra; some kids are not ready to take that in 8th grade.

Health and child care functions of public education

With respect to function of K-12, the social welfare state has become a nanny (K-12) now. The most distressing is pre-school – discussion about mandatory pre-school – to take young children out of their house for pre-school. We are seeing the failure of government-run schools; I don't think we should do it with these young children.

We have asked schools to do things that are not germane to their mission. The principal function of K-12 public education is day care.

Multiple purposes such as citizenship and job training

It is to provide an educated citizenry to be productive in the 21st Century.

The "School to Career" movement went on the back burner because of the standards movement. With School to Career, it was to establish a literacy base. The assembly jobs are probably not there anymore.

The year 2025 may be something different. We'll need skills such as to manipulate technology, communication, and a core knowledge base. The business community currently says that they get people who can't follow directions or fill out an application. The output of the educational system should

be trainable and open to the myriad of opportunities. That's why I have a strong objection to school to career. George Bush, Sr. started Goals 2000, to get smarter, more trainable workers, but at the same time I'm concerned that we'll pigeonhole these 9th graders to pick their careers. We're asking them at a young age to do that. In the last decade, studies showed that workers would change jobs at least six to seven times in their lifetimes. What are we trying to get? We want to train someone who has a knowledge base to do whatever he or she wants to do.

The mission for K-12 public education has to have a comprehensive definition, with attention to vocational education, technical training, other training, psychological development, so we don't communicate that we undervalue these things. We should think of the needs of the child, of society, and the subject matter (the disciplines). Depending on what's fashionable, one is weighted more. Who owns public education? It is a collective system and it is not easy to achieve agreement. California has been adventuresome, more extreme than the rest of the nation in part because of our economic and ethnic diversity (e.g., move toward affirmative action, then take it down).

The basic mission (statewide) is to take a large linguistically diverse group of children and make a workforce; a cohesive, peaceful society; and a prosperous society.

There are nine objectives we expect schools to meet:

- 1. To Impart Information and to Teach Intellectual Skills
- 2. To Transmit Social Values
- 3. To Develop Individuality; and to Nurture Creativity and Imagination
- 4. To Encourage Self-esteem
- 5. To Promote Good Health
- 6. To Provide Vocational Preparation
- 7. To Prepare for Life and Leisure
- 8. To Develop Moral Integrity
- 9. To Separate and Select

To reach a consensus on a limited number of objectives will not be easy.

With changing social conditions, schools have provided social and health services, and charter schools were created.

The mission of elementary and secondary public education (it is a progression) is to create successful young people, to prepare kids for the economy and workforce, to participate thoughtfully in society, give life skills, to contribute to society (social goals for the educational system). Ought to be able to pass on traditional values.

Athletics is an important function because it teaches you more than dexterity, but also teamwork – how you work in a community.

The mission of K-12 public education is to impart an ability to read, write, compute, have a sense of history, sense of civic responsibility, how to function in society and what their responsibility is as citizens. They need the basic tools. Schools should instill a respect of market processes and greater suspicion of government to organize our lives. Government always wants government to run the schools.

The mission of K-12 public education has become more complex, more an economic competitor model and less a citizenship model.

Our district has a three-fold mission: 1) to prepare children academically to be successful for life and for post-secondary training/technical training 2) to impart on young people ethics, civil responsibility, and the appreciation of community – to give back to the community – that they are owing of something (make sure they vote, care of others, do good works); and 3) engage and energize parents and community in support of kids, to work with schools, to bear their share of the responsibility.

The Multiple and Additive Functions of Public Education

The interviewees agreed that there has been a continual augmentation of functions over time to respond to perceived needs. These functions now include health and social services, transportation, nutrition programs, child care and after-school programs, athletic programs, and so on. Some interviewees characterized the multiple functions as a response to the "crisis du jour." Others were of the opinion that while they are additive, there is little interest to subtract from the broad set of functions that public education serves.

The multiple and additive functions of public education

It is also a system that everyone keeps adding on to: feeding kids, child care, multi-handicapped, health, drug and alcohol programs, field trips, lunch money, preschools, war on poverty, welfare to work, transportation, etc., but no one subtracts.
We have appended additional functions such as child care development, school athletics, social services, healthy start, immunizations (not done at the expense of the mission), but largely because of fiscal imperatives (i.e., recession, Proposition 98).
The functions are multiple and additive, to respond to the "crisis du jour."
The function is to impart and build knowledge and understanding among students. We've had to be all things to all people, and we go through cycles. Socializing kids.
We have asked schools to do things that are not germane to their missionWe have asked schools to provide health care, sex education, instruction in AIDS, healthy start (social information in a broader sense).
All issues become school issues; if there's a problem, we throw it into the pot. Schools can't by themselves remedy all those things.
you find an auxiliary mission. Auxiliary services were provided to fulfill missions such as feeding a child who comes to school hungry, or eye/hearing examinations. There are many societal issues that the Legislature asked the schools to respond to. I don't get upset that the K-12 mission is diffused because of the secondary functions. I have watched the pendulum go back and forth since the Rafferty, Riles, Honig, and Eastin eras.

Functions of K-12: feed kids, physical education – someone has to do these things. Schools are asked to do many things, but there are too many things that are used as excuses.

Functions: give lunches/breakfasts, recreation, child care, and preschool. When these start to get so overwhelming, people start to get concerned.

Are schools pushed too much to take on too many functions? How can you not? That's where kids are spending a huge amount of their time. We try to fix many social problems via the curriculum, by requirements such as drugs/alcohol, AIDS, contraception, family planning, domestic violence, and parenting.

Contrary views

The fundamental mission doesn't include adult education, job training, and preschool/child care.

There is no current central mission. It is defined by different interest groups with shifting coalitions. We need to decide what the system should give every child and what every child should have.

There's a lot of mythology about the mission of K-12 public schools. Where you sit is where you see things.

Students' Needs

Several interviewees suggested that the purpose of public education is to serve the educational needs of students. Others commented that while that is the ideal, the current system does not. Of particular concern was the split between how to serve college-bound children versus the majority who do not go to college and need job-ready skills.

Students' needs

The core mission is to meet the educational needs of students in the K-12 grades.

The mission is to prepare all students for universities that only a few go to. That's the purpose, not what it should be. The educational system does nothing to offer any means to earn a living for 80 percent and only 20 percent go on to college. Take a list of all the subjects taught that are required. If we ask ourselves, how

many people benefited? For arithmetic, reading, writing – all 100 percent. For foreign language (for California, should make it Spanish), maybe 10 percent, but 80 percent might take it and not learn. The difference between Europe and America is that they speak other languages, *of necessity*. I speak 50 languages (a continental language) of the USA. With other subject matters, the benefits go down (i.e., physics and poetry). There may be other subjects that we could get more benefit, if we permitted four years of any language, or music/art.

Interestingly, at the colleges/universities, you can get about 100 different degrees by taking the same number of units. You can't reach the same competency with the same number of units. What's so magical about the set number of units? The mission should be more in tune with the needs of students rather than having the students fitting into the system.

For each century the upward movement was toward technology – more has occurred between 1900-2000 than all the centuries before that. This change also means creating overwhelming disparity. We are products of heredity and environment. Each generation moves farther than past generations, especially in science and technology. However, if you look at us emotionally, philosophically, can you say that we are kinder, more considerate than before? The answer is *no*. The school system doesn't produce people who are better or worse than they were before. Of all the subject matters taught, we need to require critical thinking. Also, we need to ask ourselves: what is the relationship between success in school and success in life? And if there isn't any, why not?

Equalization and Adequacy of Funding

Funding issues surfaced in primarily two contexts:

- Provide equal funding as a means to achieve equal educational opportunities for all children; and
- Given the responsibility the State has to provide an education for all children, what level of funding is commensurate with that responsibility?

Funding equalization

Before the passage of Proposition 13, we had much more serious equity problems, and the educational system was a locally driven system. Over time, we have minimized the difference, but I don't think equity and equality are the same thing.

The mission of K-12 public education is that the State has a responsibility to ensure that there are equal opportunities for each child, with respect to fiscal, personnel, facilities, and access to information . . . The State has to provide equal educational opportunities for knowledge and skills.

Adequacy of funding

It is a major commitment of infrastructure resources. Are we prepared as a State to meet that?

An "enabling" system implies huge fiscal responsibilities, \$4.5 billion to do that, but we have not paid them to do that. We have made a choice not to invest in education.

With the standards the assumption is that no one fails. Question: is that assumption consistent with everyone? The rubber hits the road when you need to provide resources. Different resources, massive remediation for some – it'll depend on how much we're willing to spend. The standards will provide the base that will, at the very best, get everyone there: at the airport, at the gate.

Given current resources in time and money, can the schools pursue all of these objectives successfully? And, if they cannot, should we limit what we expect of them?

Accountability and Assessment of Public Education

Many interviewees discussed the recent implementation of accountability reforms that are based on the development and enactment of assessment programs (including the Stanford 9 examination, High School Exit examination, and the English Language Development Assessment). There seems to be consensus among the interviewees that the impetus for these reforms was to demonstrate to the public that public education is serving the needs of children in California. In the cases where some schools or students are not performing well, the reforms were instituted to provide information to students, parents, teachers, administrators, and policymakers in order to increase pressure to make improvements.

The following responses reflect an uncertainty among the interviewees about how the public education system will be able to respond to the needs of students who do not achieve at an "acceptable" (to be determined by the State Board of Education) performance level, and how consequences will ensue. Some responses assert that "passing the test" has become the current mission of public education. Other responses suggest that the tests, in themselves, will define what State expectations are, irrespective of the existence of adopted content standards.

Accountability and assessment

Today we have an "enabling" system, but one that will select children out, those
who are unable to succeed in the academic assessments.

With the emphasis on standards and testing, we expect all kids to have scores above the 50% mark, but what about those below 50%? There will be some social dislocation.

The mission is to pass the tests . . . Certain students are not going to make it; how do you ensure that all students will make it? Doing "the best with what you had" is no longer good enough. So what do teachers need to have and be able to do to accomplish this? And how do we deliver on that promise? Are there supplemental materials that are more appropriate than textbooks (i.e., as software, technology, computer terminals, and videos)? Can we provide program instruction "at your own pace?" There are some areas (rote learning) that could use some human contact, so why not use volunteers, community people, or paraprofessionals?

In the past six to seven years, there has been a shift, because so much of what was going on focused on school fiscal policy and the role of the education coalition, the State Board of Education, the California Department of Education, and the Legislature. At the same time emerged a fully entrenched phenomenon that we did not know what we were getting from our investment in public education. We lacked information on that. Thus, the mission of the State in terms of the public educational system is to: a) establish a learning environment; b) provide data; and c) hold students accountable.

The public will evaluate schools based on performance; the question will be the extent we should include attendance rates, graduation rates, parental and community involvement, and business involvement.

What we test for or emphasize is what we value – basic skills, multiple choice – these things will drive the curriculum.

Now, we have to make sure that the schools can meet the standards. They are far from driving it (the system) now; now, only the test is driving it. That's why you need a matrix test. It may be beyond the capability of the system to achieve the standards; it remains to be seen.

State and Local Tension

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was how to define the appropriate roles for the State and local educational entities. Many interviewees did not specify the State's role in defining the purpose of the public education system. The few that did comment viewed the State's role as limited or nonexistent.

The State's role in defining the purpose of public education

We are now making public education visible to the public through our efforts on accountability and assessment. Past these two roles, the State has no role.

The State has no mission or function at the State level. At the local level we find the following:

- Academic Preparation
- Workforce Occupational Training
- Music/Arts Core Enrichment
- Physical Education
- Family Life/Life Experiences
- Language Development/Assimilation/Immersion
- Social Services
- Gifted Programs
- Special Education Programs
- Adult Education Programs
- Regular Programs.

Public Schools as Centers of Communities

Several interviewees commented on the central role that public schools play in "developing a sense of community." This role includes providing a forum and facility including where many cultural and athletic events and debates may take place. Others commented on how certain communities have deemed the public schools to be irrelevant and have essentially abandoned them.

Schools as community centers

Schools have served the function of a center of communities. High schools have built new facilities to serve the community.

The mission of the schools is the cornerstone of a community; to produce young adults who can think, cipher information, read. I feel strongly about ungraded classrooms. We have transitioned to a point where the mission is to produce productive young people. While it is not perfect, its intent is a wonderful thing. For civilization, it is the cornerstone.

Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it; history is written by victors. The school in community was a bonding place; the community school was a center. Then communities began to abandon schools.

Morals and Values – Teaching Character

Several interviewees noted the importance of character education in public schools.

The teaching of morals, values, and character education

Public education tries to make up what parents don't do, to keep the social fabric together.

Schools have become a surrogate for family because of the breakdown of family and breakdown of religion. There's been a loosening of social values because of technology, decency and less charity. Where in the standards do you teach about character education and life skills?

The function of schools should also include character education and morals; religion and faith. The outputs of our system show they are confused. It's important; only 10 percent of schools do that today (i.e., private schools). At another level, character education is important because of incidents such as Columbine. There's been a disconnect; public schools have failed to provide this. It is a dangerous thing to think that government can take the place of mothers and fathers. We're not teaching teachers to teach reading, writing, and math, but asking them to be young people's parents.

The mission is to educate people to become mothers and fathers, to carry on with their children. The mission used to be to educate a child to read, write, have basic skills, be a good person, and climb the ladder to success. Used to be that you would have one problem kid; everyone else minded their Qs and Ts in my day. Now it is more complicated, changed – the system had to shift to a new body of students with different kinds of students and parents. Dope, rebellion, and afflicted, disenchanted youth. Society used to be more homogeneous, now it is highly diverse. Didn't have working women. Parents were involved. Teachers are expected to deal with more now.

Changes in Purpose Over Time

Some interviewees discussed the evolution of public education in California. The State began with a relatively elitist system of education in which only those families who could afford to pay for their children's education were allowed to attend, especially beyond the grammar grades. With the adoption of sufficient taxes (levied at the State and local levels by 1866) to provide for a "free" education, and combined with compulsory education laws (enacted in 1874), public education became widely available. Several interviewees emphasized the continual change in the underlying purpose of public education as reflecting the needs of society. Others claimed that despite changes in society, public schools have resisted change.

Evolution of California's public education

Initially, the public education system was established for those individuals who had the stamina to survive it, and through natural selection would select those who could make it through.

Public education was funded for self-preservation; self-governance and self-civility. It was based on Horace Mann's principles that the common schools would be so good that even the rich families would say, why not send their children there too, and no one would be cynical about it. The mission has changed over time. We have to ask ourselves, what does society need? The answer is all of the above: technology, love, literacy, and preparation for the world of work, college, not to go to jail. We have emphasized different things at different times. For the 21st Century, we will have to be technologically competent, prepared for advanced education – the brain will have to work! There will be few jobs in construction and manufacturing.

The school "function" is based on a factory model – the dominance of the 50-minute period, and even though there are more year-round schools, the model is still pretty traditional.

The Relationship of the Purpose and Quality of Teachers

Several interviewees stressed the importance of a quality teaching force as a primary means to achieve the purposes of public education. Some interviewees discussed the need for strengthening teacher preparation programs. Several interviewees raised the issue of instituting a different incentive system as a way to appropriately compensate "good" teachers, and remove those deemed "bad."

Increasing teacher salaries was a common concern, generating suggestions of raising the standards for the teaching profession to be compared to other professions such as medicine and law. Financial incentives were also mentioned in the context of selective recruitment, such as for specialties in high demand, like math and science. The need to provide in-service support to teachers was also discussed.

The relationship between teachers and the purpose of public education

The decisions of classroom teachers are a vital part. Teachers have not been properly trained, but need support. Supplementary instruction needs to be used differently, predicating on students' needs.

Teachers need to be well equipped, and teacher preparation has to be right at the top. We need to treat them like professionals, as an association to police their own field and have merit pay. We need higher pay; presumably you would get more productivity. There are two key things missing: a) rewarding the good people; and b) getting rid of the bad people. In other professions, such as the medical board could withdraw a license, whereas with teachers it is difficult to find academic malpractice.

We need to provide public education through a different incentive system, because we've created a system that is immune to change. For example, how can we get rid of incompetent teachers? The teachers believe that it's important for the students to feel good about themselves, to give them confidence. So if a student doesn't know algebra, etc. it's okay as long as they feel good about themselves . . . need to change the rules. Provide differential pay to attract teachers in math and science.

The function of the schools doesn't support the mission. We're expecting way too much of teachers and not compensating them. Part of me doesn't believe in compulsory education – to reek havoc on 30 kids because of one . . . Schools don't have a buyer's market; it's a diminished pool now. "It's just a job." We need to think about how to get good teachers – the quality of teachers is the most important issue.

School Choice for Parents

Several interviewees discussed the importance of providing choice for parents in selecting a provider of education. Some interviewees discussed the "monopoly" that "government-run" schools have. This view would encourage parents to seek out different options to best suit their needs, including private or charter schools.

School Choice

My view is that the public education system is comprised of government-run schools. It's a monopoly, but not the only provider . . . On a larger scale, poor parents are willing to self select – home schooling and private schools. There's a growing base for other options – charter schools.

Scale of Class, School, and District

A few interviewees mentioned the importance of scale with respect to class size, school size, and district size, as facilitating the mission of public education.

Role of Scale of Class, School, and District

I think schools should be much smaller because kids are less likely to fall through
the cracks, and with smaller schools each child becomes the whole school's
project.

Also important is the size of school, type of principal.

I would rather have smaller schools for Los Angeles.

THE EFFECTS OF THE STATE-ADOPTED CONTENT STANDARDS

A second major theme the interviews explored was the role the recently adopted content standards might have on California's changing economy. In general, interviewees felt that the adopted content standards are an ideal for which to strive. A common concern was whether the State would be able to accomplish that level of achievement and the high standards for all students. Several interviewees noted that in order to accomplish these challenging goals, additional resources will be needed. Others questioned the applicability of the content standards to the "real world," and suggested that the focus of learning should be on students' needs. One commented that there is not necessarily a correlation between being smart and becoming rich.

Several comments focused on the responsibility that employers and alternative learning schools have in supporting and offering the education needed to achieve the standards. There was some skepticism expressed, that the standards may be an excuse for not providing a universal academic education. Several interviewees are of the opinion that the standards are misdirected; they are set too high and will not be realized; they do not sufficiently emphasize the needs of technology; and they are not what is driving the system, but rather the achievement tests are, as the current Stanford 9 tests are not fully aligned to the content standards.

Effects of the adopted content standards

The State-adopted standards were developed to prepare our graduates for a complex world and lifelong learning. How they (the standards) can be translated into instruction hasn't been well thought out. The support to achieve the standards is going to be difficult. The unspoken assumption is that every student will go on to college – the standards imply this. Looking at the student population needs to be taken into consideration, because a different developmental level is needed now than in the beginning of the system (agricultural) and in terms of skills and attitudes, but we are still in that mode, of agricultural. The standards need to focus on students' needs. They need concrete work, as an opportunity to orient them. They spend 16-18 years in school but they don't have a concrete understanding of the world of work and opportunities.

With the standards came a whole movement . . . The standards provide us with a minimum base . . . We now have a state-based curriculum, so where do you set the performance levels? Then, what do you do when everyone has done his or her best? What role and responsibility will employers have? Continuation schools are no school or pretend school, but it's better than being on the streets or in jail. How and what do you deliver to these students?

California Research Bureau, California State Library

The standards were developed as an idealized state of learning for all students. They established what was developmentally appropriate versus intellectually appropriate. Everyone knows that the standards are an ideal to work towards, because of the current shortage of teachers, of time, and the lack of rigor. We have an egalitarian set of expectations, and we have raised those to the highest achievement, but it is a difficult thing to do.

With respect to the academic content standards, the English/Language Arts/History/Social Studies were well received. However, the math and to some degree science, while at a high level and rigor, shifted the balance to skills. You need both memorization and problem solving skills, but the current emphasis is on the drill and not enough on conceptualization. Problem solving and the ability to work in groups will be most needed in our upcoming economy, also the ability to think and communicate. Conceptual understanding is purposefully deemphasized. What we are creating is a lack of flexibility – to work independently and to apply old skills in new environments.

I think that adopting standards is a terrible idea at the State level. California has started with high expectations, to shock the system, unlike Texas, where they started low and sought to elevate the system over time. Over a period of time, the standards will not be seen as significant – just as another fad.

The focus is now on outcomes – to determine what students know and are able to do. We are just beginning down that path, but don't know how it will work. Now, we have to make sure that the schools can meet the standards. They are far from driving it (the system); now, only the test is driving it. That's why you need a matrix. It may be beyond the capability of the system to achieve the standards; it remains to be seen.

The standards are in response to a political need, not responding to an economic need. An example is the algebra standards. They are higher than any school teacher needs to have – CBEST doesn't have a question about algebra. I don't think a child needs to have algebra for a service economy. We got carried away with the standards; we wanted to be tougher than everyone else.

The mission is clearly defined with its agenda – the State has adopted standards in four core areas: frameworks, state tests, half a billion dollars for textbooks, and teacher training. Our mission is that we want our children to achieve at a level

where they are successful. We need to stay the course. Is it easy to do this? No. The standards are at a high level, yes, very rigorous, and pitched to the successful. Some people think that some won't make it so we should set other standards. The worst thing that goes on is that the expectations for poor or English language learners are low. So it's never about what we do; it's the neighborhood . . . excuses . . . First and foremost it's academic preparation. We don't need School to Career; that's non-academic and has been off-course. Business wants from us graduates that can read, write, spell, and compute. We have messed up middle schools; children would do better in self contained classrooms.

The standards are wrong-headed – they made no reference to technology at all.

LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED

Christine Aranda, Ed.D., former Assistant Deputy Secretary, Office of Secretary of Education, Governor's Office

Mary Bergan, President, California Federation of Teachers

Ken Burt, Liaison Program Coordinator, California Teacher's Association

Davis Campbell, Executive Director, California School Boards Association

Greg Geeting, Interim Executive Director, State Board of Education

Dave Gordon, Superintendent, Elk Grove Unified School District

Senator Leroy Greene, former Chair of Senate and Assembly Education Committees

Ken Hall, President, School Services, Inc.

Jerry Hayward, Director, Policy Analysis for California Education

Irving Hendrick, Ph.D., University of California, Riverside

Sonia Hernandez, former Deputy Superintendent, Curriculum & Instructional Leadership, California Department of Education

Scott Hill, Chief Deputy Superintendent for Accountability and Administration, California Department of Education

Bill Honig, former State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Glee Johnson, former Chief Deputy Chancellor, Chancellor's Office of California Community Colleges, and former Assistant Secretary, Office of Child Development and Education, Governor's Office under Governor Pete Wilson

Marion Joseph, Member, State Board of Education, former Associate Superintendent under State Superintendent Wilson Riles

Michael Kirst, Ph.D., Stanford University

Bill Lucia, Chief of Staff, Senator Poochigian's Office, former Executive Director, State Board of Education

Roger Magyar, Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus

John Mockler, former Executive Director, State Board of Education and Interim Secretary for Education

Allan Post, retired, former Legislative Analyst

Peter Shrag, Contributing Editor, Sacramento Bee

Rick Simpson, Chief Consultant, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly

Bill Whiteneck, retired, former Chief Consultant, Senate Education Committee